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I. F. Stone's Weekly

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Before We Turn Laos Into Another Korea

The irony in the crisis over Laos is that this little country was for a short time last year the only country in the world which had succeeded in achieving national unity by our favorite American formula—unification by free elections. Indeed the elections were held in exactly the way favored by our friend Syngman Rhee in Korea, i.e. the elections which finally unified the country were not nationwide but confined to the northern provinces which had hitherto been under the control of the Communist-led Pathet Lao. The balloting in May of 1958 was for 21 new seats which were added to the National Assembly, raising its total membership to 59. Because of a split in the conservative forces, the Pathet Lao won 9 of the 21 new seats and a smaller neutralist party won four. This gave the Left 13 votes in a National Assembly dominated by the 36 votes of the anti-Communist Rally of the Lao People. The Left "still was not anywhere near a majority," as Eric Kocher, director of the State Department's South-East Asia Affairs told a House Government Operations subcommittee last March.* The Pathet Lao were given two seats in the Cabinet, their leader Prince Souphanouvong being made Minister for Planning. The other post which went to the Left, perhaps in that whimsicality supposed to be characteristic of Laos, was the Ministry of Religion and Fine Arts.

Successful Trickery

The agreement which brought about these elections and this coalition, ending a continuously smoldering state of civil war in Laos, was opposed by the U. S. government. Mr. Dulles had refused to take part in the 1954 Geneva talks which ended the war in Indo-China, and encouraged the Diem government in the southern part of divided Vietnam to break that part of the Geneva accord which called for the unification of Vietnam by free elections; Dulles and Diem feared that these elections would be won by Ho Chi-minh and the Communist led forces of the north. In Laos, the State Department opposed the agreement for a coalition and elections because it feared a Czech-style take-over from within. "We did everything we could," Walter S. Robertson, then Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, told the Porter Hardy subcommittee last March, "to keep it [i.e. a coalition] from happening." But the alternative, a divided country and endemic civil war, was unpopular in Laos. (See box on this page). The Pathet Lao, fearing trickery, had insisted that the elections be held under the supervision of a coalition Cabinet. The outcome showed that their fears were well-founded. The Geneva accord had set up an International Control Commission of India, Canada and Poland to bring about peaceful unification of Laos by free elections. On July 19, 1958, after the May election results had been certified and the two northern provinces united with the rest of the country, the Control Commission voted 2-to-1, Poland being the dissenter, to adjourn *sine die.* Three days later the Prime Minister of Laos resigned and then formed a new government without the two Pathet Lao ministers. "The point is," as Mr. Robertson told the Porter Hardy subcommittee, "they did get their provinces back from the Communists and they did get rid of the coalition."

How U.S. Blocked Laotian Unity

Mr. [John T. M.] REDDAN [chief counsel subcommittee]: Who was putting the pressure on the [Laos] government to enter into this coalition [with Pathet Lao]?

Mr. [Eric] KOCHER [Director, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, Dept. of State]: These were mostly Cabinet members, and they also said there was a feeling, a strong feeling among the population for unity. They had been disunified for so long that now for the first time they really wanted to get together as one country with all the Lao people together and then everything would work out fine.

[Security Deletion]

Mr. REDDAN: You say the Lao Government was told that if they went through with this coalition we might withhold aid from them? Is that a correct interpretation?

Mr. KOCHER: I don't think it was quite as strong as that. That we would have to consider reassessing our policy toward Laos. . . .

Mr. REDDAN: No one laid it on the line, in other words, that if you go through with this coalition, no more aid?

Mr. KOCHER: It wasn't done as bluntly as that. . . . As I said, many times it appeared as if the coalition government was about to take place, even before that, over a period of perhaps two years before it actually did take place. We each time bent every effort to prevent that.

—Executive session, Porter Hardy subcommittee of Gov't Operations, March 11, on U.S. aid in Laos.

Just Like de Gaulle

This was neat footwork, though somewhat below the high moral plane of formal State Department declarations. Ever since the government of Laos has become less democratic. Last January the National Assembly dissolved itself and voted the Prime Minister emergency powers which Under Secretary of State Dillon described to the Porter Hardy subcommittee as "generally similar to the types of powers that were voted to General de Gaulle's government in France." The subcommittee report last June described them less delicately as "dictatorial" and said one of the first acts of the new govern-

(*Continued on Page Four*)

*** See Page 33 of the newly released censored transcript of hearings on U. S. Aid Operations in Laos before the Porter Hardy subcommittee of House Government Operations, a rich mine of background information on the current crisis.**

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Kastenmeier, Freshman Democrat from Wisconsin, Offers Resolution Against Germ Weapons

First Protest in Congress Against New Horrors for "Little Wars" (Like Laos?)

"Mr. Speaker, I have taken the floor today to speak to you about a problem which I feel is important to us as a nation of free people who honor and protect life, and hopefully, represent and live as a moral and good people. My talk is the increased emphasis by the Defense Department on the CBR program; that is, the chemical, biological, and radiological warfare program. The Defense Department is interested in increasing the CBR program from an approximately current level of $40 million to $125 million.

"We should note that it does not take a great level of technological skill or great amounts of money to build chemical and biological weapons. It is not unlikely that smaller nations that are less responsible would begin using these deadly weapons against each other. This, of course, is why it is of paramount importance that the United States set a moral tone in this area.

Not for Preventive War But—

"I wish to consider the subtle but real change in policy for which adoption is pressed by those connected with the CBR program. The purpose is to gain acceptance for chemical and biological weapons, as just another weapon in our arsenal. Gen. [Wm. A.] Creasy [former head of the Army Chemical Corps] suggested before the House Space Committee that CR be used as an offensive weapon. He stated on page 15 of the hearings [before that committee]—

I am not advocating preventive war but we must change our policy, which is that we don't hit back until you hit us.

"The argument of the Defense Department, through General Stubbs, is that a war fought with chemical weapons is a more humane war. They talk about their psychochemicals which can make cowards out of brave men and vice versa; they tell of the possibilities of sleep chemicals which will put populations to sleep for hours, while soldiers march in and take over the area. This, of course, is not the whole story. General Creasy has stated that CBR weapons are as deadly or deadlier than nuclear warfare.

CBR for Brush-Fire Wars

"How would these weapons be used? Judging from the testimony before the Space Committee, these instruments of warfare would be used in the so-called brush-fire localized war. CBR would take the place of nuclear weapons in this kind of encounter. Depending on the kind of bacteria or chemical used, the results could be just as horrendous, indiscriminate and inhumane as if nuclear weapons were, in fact, used. Indeed, there are those that take the position that we should not build these weapons, arguing that the range of destruction which we have in our defense arsenel would seem to be quite complete without an expended CBR program.

The Kastenmeier Resolution

"House Concurrent Resolution 33, Reaffirming the long-standing policy of the U.S. that the U.S. shall not engage in biological or gas warfare unless such weapons are first used by our enemies.

"Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the Congress hereby reaffirms the long-standing policy of the United States that in the event of war, the United States shall under no circumstances resort to the use of biological weapons or the use of poisonous or obnoxious gasses unless they are first used by our enemies."

—Introduced Sept. 3 by Kastenmeier (. Wis.)

Kastenmeier Himself Partly Won Over

"Given the present world situation, I am sure that this is not a realistic position. There is strong evidence to suggest that the Soviet Union is engaging in a build-up of biological and chemical weapons. Hence, the realities of the situation appear to demand that we ourselves engage in an increased program. I might add that I agree to this view only reluctantly.

"The fact, however, that we might have to have an expanded program in this field does not mean that we should change the basic policies of the United States which were reiterated by President Roosevelt on June 8, 1943, when he stated that the U. S. under no circumstances would use poisonous or obnoxious gases unless used first by our enemies. This policy is being attacked on all fronts by various officials close to the Defense Department. For example, General Rothschild stated [in *Harpers* for June]:

We must reject once and for all the position stated by President Roosevelt that an enemy can have the first chemical or biological blow wherever or whenever he wishes. That blow could be disastrous. We must make it clear that we consider these weapons among the normal usable means of war.

Mr. Speaker, unless we are willing to express publicly a moral national policy on this issue we will be creating the impression that we are oblivious to the horrors that these weapons bring if unleashed. I am introducing today a concurrent resolution which will reaffirm our policy of non-use of biological and chemical weapons unless they are first used by our enemy. This is the way our historical heritage and our moral values can be reaffirmed."

—Kastenmeier (D. Wis.) in the House Sept. 3 (Abridged)

Williams (N.J.) Introduces Bill for World Action Against Radioactivity

Senator Harrison A. Williams (D. N.J.) introduced a bill, S 2645, on Sept. 3 which would lay the foundations for international cooperation in combatting radiation hazards. Senator Williams said Senator Hill had already introduced a bill (S. 1628, discussed in our last week's issue) which would give the U. S. Public Health Service authority to establish radiation health standards. Williams said his bill would authorize the Surgeon General, as head of USPHS, to invite other nations to participate in a world-wide project to "first, accumulate and disseminate reliable data on actual atomic fallout and other sources of radiation; second, promote accelerated research by all governments and agencies into the precise health effects of radiation and the means for curbing it; and third, disseminate to the medical and health professions and the peoples of the world . . . the results of these studies." The bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare where it may be pigeonholed with the Hill bill unless there is public pressure.

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Compromise Passport Bill Approved Allowing Ban on Travel to China

Walter Defeated in House Vote on Faceless Informer Issue

Bulletin: The 18 votes for unrestricted freedom to travel and against the Selden passport bill, all Democratic, were cast by Anderson (Mont), Barr (Ind), Celler (NY), Dingell (Mich), Flynn (Wis), Green (Ore), Harmon (Ind), Johnson (Col), Kasem (Cal), Kastenmeier (Wis), Metcalf (Mont), Meyer (Vt), O'Hara (Mich), Porter (Ore), Reuss (Wis), Thompson (NJ), Ullman (Ore), and Wier (Minn).

For the first time in many years Chairman Walter of the House Un-American Activities Committee suffered a defeat on the floor of the House last Tuesday on a civil liberties issue. He was voted down 98 to 29 when he offered an amendment which would have allowed the State Department to use confidential informants in denying passports. Two similar amendments by Bentley (R. Mich.) were also voted down. The House then approved an amendment to the pending Selden passport control bill (HR 9069) which struck out the words, "adherence to unpopular views, or criticisms of the United States or its domestic or foreign policies" at the end of a sentence beginning, "The Secretary of State shall not deny a passport to any person solely on the basis of membership in any organization or association with any individual or group." This amendment was offered by Coffin (D. Me.) on behalf of the House Foreign Affairs Committee which had rushed the bill to the floor on Monday under a rarely used procedure allowing it to bypass the Rules committee but requiring only a majority vote. The words stricken by the House had been criticized as a restriction on freedom of speech. Congressman Meyer (D. Vt.), the sole dissenter on the Committee in reporting out the bill, said the House was being "panicked" into passage without full consideration. The bill passed 371 to 18.

State Dept. Against Disclosure

The bill as passed requires a hearing in passport cases and judicial review "on the record." This was criticized as vague by Celler and Meyer. The sponsor of the bill, Selden of Alabama, joined Hays, Coffin, Fascell of Florida and O'Hara of Illinois in assuring the House it was the intent of the phrase to outlaw faceless informers. Walter thereupon tried unsuccessfully to strike the words "on the record" from the bill. Meyer told the House the State Department's security officer, John W. Hanes, had said the Department preferred no bill at all to one which would require it to disclose the sources of accusation against passport applicants. There seems little likelihood that a companion bill will pass the Senate before adjournment.

Abner Green

To his family and to the much maligned American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born we extend our sympathy in the death at 46 of its long time executive secretary, Abner Green. The Committee was Abner Green's life work for 25 years. He was a radical without rancor, a man of great purity of spirit. He leaves the example of a life lived with genuine devotion.

Fear of Porter's Suit?

No action had been expected in the House either and no one outside the inner leadership circle seems to know just why the Selden bill was suddenly rushed to passage. There is some reason to suspect that the Department wanted the bill approved because it contains a section allowing the President by annual declaration to shut off certain areas if he thinks travel there would "seriously impair the foreign relations of the United States." Communist China is the main consideration, and Judd was for the bill though conceding regretfully that it might force the Department to grant certain passport applications rather than reveal confidential sources. An amendment by Porter (D. Ore.) to strike area control was voted down. The bill seems to be a China Lobby operation designed to undercut Porter's pending suit challenging the Department's refusal to give him a passport to visit China.

In an able speech on the floor the preceding Saturday (Sept. 5), Porter told the House, "I do not think we should be a party to tying the hands of Congress and its committee and its members who want to travel throughout the world, to see for themselves as best they can the facts which underlie any sensible, effective foreign policy." Porter's independent pro-democratic activities in Latin America have irked the State Department which finds dictators easier to get along with.

A noteworthy feature of the Selden bill as passed is that it allows refusal of passports to Communists or those furthering Communist causes abroad only in cases where the membership or activities occurred after January 1, 1951. Pre-Korean war Communism is thus "forgiven." This is another index of the improving atmosphere.

Latest Bulletins from UN and Moscow on Nuclear Test Ban Talks Hopeful

"After their talk with Mr. Khrushchev yesterday, Mr. Gaitskell and Mr. Bevan are convinced that we are on the verge of an agreed ban on testing of nuclear weapons. Matters of detail, not principle, separate the two sides, and compromise not detrimental to either is in sight. They believe Mr. Khrushchev has decided on such an agreement but wants to save it for the prestige of a fully fledged summit conference. Before that, his forthcoming talks with Pres. Eisenhower can easily resolve outstanding differences with the Americans."

—London Observer (Sept. 6) from Moscow.

"I understand that some people feel that the [Geneva Nuclear Testing] Conference has made no progress to speak of and that the Soviet delegation remains completely intransigent on all fronts. . . . Even though several thorny questions remain to be answered, we cannot dismiss the hard-won progress of the Conference as being of little or no importance. . . .

"When you stop to consider that for the first time since disarmament talks began in 1946, the Soviet Union is expressing adherence to a system of control which embodies permanent control posts manned at least in part by foreign personnel, mobile inspection teams with access to Soviet territory and over-flights of Soviet territory, the significance of these negotiations for the future of disarmament become apparent."

—Ambassador James J. Wadsworth, head of the U.S. delegation at Geneva, press conference United Nations Sept. 3.

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Was This Lao Crisis Appeal to the United Nations Planned in Advance?

(*Continued from Page One*)

ment was to purge the Communists. To the risks of civil conflict there were added international complications when this new government on February 11 declared itself no longer bound by the Geneva agreements which sought to insulate Laos from the cold war and to keep it out of either bloc. A dispatch from Hong Kong in the *New York Times* last February 13 noted that this denunciation of the Geneva accords left Laos "free to join SEATO, though it is understood the government does not plan any such move at present. Closer ties with SEATO, however," Tillman Durdin cabled his paper, "are in prospect through increased Laotian cooperation with the United States." These moves were risky and seem to have been taken only on the urging of American officials and on their promise of aid if trouble broke out.

Who Is Making Policy on Laos?

Senator Mansfield, warning the Senate last Monday "to go slow on any direct military involvement" in Laos, wondered whether policy there had been firmly in the hands of the President and the Secretary of State or whether we really have "a policy based on executive agency accommodation, with the Defense Department, the ICA, the CIA, or whatever, each putting in an oar and the State Department trying to guide the boat while it does not really have the power to control the rudder." We should like to see this delicate hint widen into a full-scale investigation before our country is drawn into another Korea in the Far East. Since Senator Mansfield cited the Porter Hardy subcommittee report on the corruption and ineptitude of our mutual security program in Laos (see this *Weekly* for last June 22 on that report), we would like to call his attention to a puzzling passage in the recently published hearings held by that subcommittee. This would seem to indicate (see box on this page) that in January of this year the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the first time began setting forth tasks for the Laotian army and that one of them (elided by the security censor) seems to have involved some kind of holding operation "for the time required to invoke the UN Charter or the SEATO Treaty." Could it be that the present crisis—including the appeal to the UN—was foreseen and planned in advance at the Pentagon?

Secret Instructions to the Laotian Army

Mr. [John L.] HOLCOMBE [Director, Office of Programing and Control, International Security Affairs, Dept. of Defense]: The actual JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] recommendation reached us in the same form as they have for past years, in a letter to the Secretary of Defense. . . . In this most recent one, 1959, JCS for the first time gave us tasks for the Laotian military forces.

[Security Deletion]

Mr. [John T. M.] REDDAN [Chief Counsel, subcommittee]: What is that period of time?

Mr. HOLCOMBE: For the time required to invoke the UN Charter or the SEATO Treaty.

Mr. REDDAN: What period of time would be required to do that?

Mr. HOLCOMBE: I do not remember that there is in the record anywhere a military evaluation of what that time would be.

Mr. REDDAN: You mean they are aiming at a time limit for a holding action?

Mr. HOLCOMBE: That is correct.

—Executive Session, March 12, 1959, U.S. Aid Operations in Laos. Hearings before the Porter Hardy subcommittee of the House Committee on Government Operations, censored transcript, newly published, page 68.

Neither A-Bomb Nor Germ War Will Do

It may be that we misread the passage and that there are less sinister explanations for it. In that case some Senator should examine the uncensored record and give assurance to the contrary. In any case, the situation in Laos is really quite simple. Either we have enough faith in free elections to let Laos work out its problems peacefully or we push the country further into dictatorship and war. In a country like Laos which is mostly trackless jungle, small groups of guerrillas can fight on for years. Our atom bombs and the more "humane" germ and biological weapons we are now touting for brush-fire wars (see page 2) are alike helpless in this situation. The key to it is political, not military, and without a political solution, civil strife cannot be prevented. There on the borders of China it may easily ignite a broader conflict. Either we move toward war or we find some face-saving means to patch up again the truce we upset last year.

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